



EUROPEAN POLICY BRIEF



Ethnic Differences in Education for Urban Youth in an Enlarged Europe

An eu-funded research project investigating the impact of educational policies on Roma and second-generation migrant youth in the Czech Republic, Denmark, France, Germany, Hungary, Romania, Slovakia, Sweden and the United Kingdom

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INTRODUCTION

Policy context

Policymakers and experts across Europe have recognised that ethnicity plays an increasingly important role in determining the career paths and life chances of young people. Despite anti-discrimination policies and considerable investment in education by European welfare states, Roma youths and young people from migrant backgrounds today face diminished opportunities for meaningful participation in economic, social, and political life. While several factors have contributed to this trend, one cannot ignore the decisive impact of ethnic differences in schooling.

It seems ethnically differentiated educational practices are crucial determinants of social inclusion. In Europe's case, these educational differences are forging inequalities that challenge the European Union's fundamental values and chip away at the foundations of social order.

The impact of educational differences among ethnic minorities in Europe is illustrated by the experiences of two distinct groups in two geographical regions: second-generation immigrants in the Western half of the continent and Roma in Central and Eastern Europe. Despite great variations in economic development and welfare state arrangements in these regions, people affiliated with the two groups are confronting similar challenges of 'minoritisation' and 'othering.' They tend to experience new and intensive forms of involuntary separation, second-class citizenship and exclusion. More often than not, they are subjected to a lack of recognition from their earliest years. And this holds true regardless of whether the groups in question are living in old or new member states of the European Union. Clearly, fresh policies are needed to address these issues.

KEY OBSERVATIONS

Are European societies meeting their obligation to provide free compulsory education to all children?

How social and ethnic differences are manifested and reinforced in the daily working of schools

The notion of “compulsory education for all” is more an ideal than a reality. Sizeable groups of children do not receive even primary education. Some formally complete compulsory schooling without learning the basics, while others leave school early or drop out prior to acquiring any certificates usable on the job market, and some others are diverted to the side-tracks of mainstream education. The drop-out rates show notable differences among majority and ethnic minority students: prior to completing compulsory education, 7-8 per cent of majority students consider leaving school, while 22 per cent of ‘visible minorities’ are at risk of dropping out. These phenomena are heavily loaded with social and ethnic/racial implications:

Evidence shows that children of marginalised groups, especially children of poor families of minority ethnic background, are most at risk of educational exclusion.

What are the ethnic implications of tracking?

Educational systems across Europe have diverse ways for tracking students into different areas of study or kinds of professional training. While a great amount of attention is paid to the best timing for tracking, the ethnic implications are rarely considered. An ethnic lens shows that tracking itself matters: it works to the detriment of ethnic minority groups everywhere. Vocational tracks attended mainly by minority ethnic students often do not provide the skills needed to successfully enter the labour market. Tracking hinders advancement toward higher education and thereby contributes to the worrisome increase in youth unemployment.

How does early separation in education affect performance and future prospects?

Minority ethnic students are largely educated amidst segregated conditions. This segregation is partially a by-product of the given residential conditions: spontaneous processes of “white flight”, local educational policies aimed at raising efficiency through inter- and intra-school streaming, and attempts by minority ethnic parents to protect children from discrimination. Educational segregation often concludes in a gradual downgrading of the quality and the content of teaching. This results in lowered performance and the accumulation of disadvantages in advancement toward the secondary and higher levels.

A clear distinction can also be observed among students who are held back and required to repeat school years: 8 per cent of students of poor socio-economic background from the majority population are required repetition, while this ratio is 22 per cent for ‘visible minority’ children.

Distribution of students from different ethnic backgrounds among the types of schools by socio-ethnic “profile”

“Top” schools: The proportion of students from ethnic majority background is above 80 per cent, and the ratio of disadvantaged students remains below 20 per cent.

Majority schools, dominantly non-poor: The proportion of students from ethnic majority background is between 50 and 80 per cent, and the ratio of disadvantaged students remains below 50 per cent.

Majority schools, dominantly poor: The proportion of students from majority ethnic background is between 50 and 80 per cent, and the ratio of disadvantaged students is above 50 per cent.

Ethnic minority schools, dominantly non-poor: The proportion of students from minority ethnic backgrounds is above 50 per cent, while the ratio of disadvantaged students remains below 50 per cent.

Ethnic minority schools, dominantly poor: The proportion of both students from minority ethnic and disadvantaged backgrounds is above 50 per cent.

What effects does school segregation have on inter-ethnic relations?

Segregation is a key driver of inequality regarding educational and vocational opportunities.

Segregated conditions in education tend to result in early ethnic enclosure and isolation. Findings of our research show that, for the most part, minority ethnic children have very limited contacts with peers from the majority. This way the demarcation lines between “them” and “us” are reinforced and learning about each other is severely hindered on both sides. Nevertheless, the research shows that students from minority ethnic backgrounds perform better and feel safer in schools where they experience ethnic diversity among their teachers. While students and parents often note that segregation in school helps them feel safe and protected, they pay a high price for it: inclusion into the practices, routines, and institutions of the mainstream society is often blocked simply by lacking the knowledge how to proceed (where to turn to for help, whom to contact, etc.). Lowered aspirations and limited paths for mobility are evident implications.

How do students cope with divergent norms in their school and home environments?

Minority ethnic students often face contradictions between the values, norms, and practices imposed on them by the school and those found in their immediate home environment. The strategies to overcome these tensions include:

- open opposition to school (often manifesting itself in truancy, drug-use and gang membership)
- early escape from the family
- radical withdrawal from all social contacts outside kin-relations.

Do minority ethnic students want schooling?**Social alienation induces feelings of insecurity and lowers mobility aspiration among ethnic minority youth.**

Despite all the controversies that second generation migrants and Roma children face in schools, they seem strongly committed to education. They share a conviction that one cannot build up a successful adult life without proper schooling. Furthermore, children from migrant backgrounds see their own education as the very purpose of their parents' move, and they wish to meet those expectations. Against this backdrop, the downgrading experiences gained in low-quality segregated schools induce a high degree of frustration.

Multicultural vs. colour-blind practices**Many children from migrant backgrounds regard the downgrading tendency in the educational system as a manifestation of institutional discrimination.**

In themselves, educational policies for inclusion are too weak to break the vicious circle produced by poverty, residential separation, labour market segmentation and the group-specific welfare schemes. Schools do make a difference, but both multicultural and colour-blind practices have shortcomings. Separating "different" children in the name of equal rights out of respect for different cultures can actually hinder integration. In Central and Eastern Europe, "multicultural" education often means that Roma students are selected to attend "special classes." At the same time, colour-blind school practices may neglect the special needs that minority ethnic or Roma students have with respect to language, reading, and other skills. Such practices can result in lower academic performance and slower advancement which then serve as justification for downward selection at the time of institutional tracking.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR POLICY-MAKERS

Access to education for all children

- Assure that all children on European soil have access to education, and that expectations on educational outcomes for children with an ethnic background are not lowered.
- Reach out to children of illegal migrants, unsettled groups, and undocumented Roma families who currently face the greatest risk of being “forgotten” by education.

Reducing risk of dropping out

- As children of poor immigrant families are at greatest risk of dropping out of school, promote measures that decrease that risk. These measures should include:
 - welfare to assist families in which children are under pressure to contribute to family income
 - out-of-school teaching and training programs

Comprehensive early language programmes

- Promote comprehensive early language programmes among children from minority ethnic backgrounds.
- Establish early language programmes in kindergartens and pre-schools.
- Assure that children from minority ethnic backgrounds take part in early language programmes long enough to attain proficiency in the dominant language of their country of residence prior to school enrolment.

Extracurricular activities

- Encourage community-run extracurricular activities to address needs for specialisation during early phases of education.

Differences in the conditions and quality of schooling

- Prioritise desegregation as a focus of European educational policy (mixing by ethnic background and social standing).
- Postpone formalised streaming and tracking until a later phase of compulsory education, and make sure that children from minority ethnic backgrounds represent a fair share in all specialised formations.
- Develop more effective mechanisms to attain social and ethnic mixing among students at all levels and in all classes.
- Intensify efforts to reduce differences in the conditions and quality of schooling for children from migrant and Roma backgrounds.

A multicultural approach to teaching

- Promote multicultural contents and forms of teaching and socialisation in order to encourage equal recognition, mutual respect and friendly interethnic relations.
 - Extend the notion of multiculturalism toward the school personnel and provide incentives to schools management, teachers and support staff to cope with the ethnic diversity in their schools and classes.
 - Promote ethnic mixing as an aspect of the employment policy of the educational institutions.
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RESEARCH PARAMETERS

Objectives

The EDUMIGROM project provided a comprehensive framework for understanding variations of ‘minoritisation’ on ethnic grounds in schools and the broader educational environment in urban settings. The research critically examined how schools operate with respect to knowledge distribution and socialisation and how they contribute to reducing, maintaining, or deepening inequalities in young people’s access to the labour market, education and training. Impact of schooling on social, cultural, and political participation was also examined.

Methodology

The research employed both quantitative and qualitative methodologies and distinguished between five levels of analysis: (1) cross-country comparative inquiry; (2) macro-level studies; (3) community-level fieldwork; (4) school-level fieldwork; (5) investigations on the personal level.

Site selection

Each country analysis involved two multi-ethnic communities with relatively high proportions of minority ethnic inhabitants from selected backgrounds (Roma and people belonging to ‘visible’ minority groups), a wide range of industries and services, a full-fledged social structure, and a diversity of schools serving young adolescents.

Focus group

14-17 year-old youth at the turning point of leaving behind compulsory education in multi-ethnic urban communities.

Qualitative and quantitative fieldwork

Fieldwork focused on educational advancement and future educational and labour market career aspirations of students; daily lives and inter-ethnic relations in schools; identity formation; relations between schools and families; relations between schools and communities.

	Quantitative Inquiries	Qualitative Inquiries
Czech Republic	Target group: Roma 21 schools, 918 questionnaires	Target group: Roma 57 interviews, 8 focus groups
Denmark	Target group: Turkish and Kurdish, Middle East/Arab 7 schools, 392 questionnaires	Target group: "Immigrants" (Turkish/Kurdish, Pakistani, Somali, Middle East/Arab) 28 interviews, 6 focus groups
France	Target group: Maghreb/African and Turkey 6 schools, 512 questionnaires	Target group: Maghreb/African & Turkey 97 interviews, 8 focus groups
Germany	Target group: Turkish/Arab, Polish/Russian 16 schools, 1200 questionnaires	Target group: Turkish & Lebanese 52 interviews, 6 focus groups
Hungary	Target group: Roma 18 schools, 611 questionnaires	Target group: Roma 61 interviews; 13 focus groups
Romania	Target group: Roma 10 schools, 509 questionnaires	Target group: Roma 43 interviews, 5 focus groups
Slovakia	Target group: Roma 20 schools, 502 questionnaires	Target group: Roma
Sweden	N.A.	Target group: "Immigrants" (Africa/Middle-East/South, South-East Asia/Balkans) 34 interviews, 9 focus groups
United Kingdom	Target group: Black Caribbean, Pakistani 3 schools, 434 questionnaires	Target group: Black Caribbean, Pakistani, Gypsy/Traveller

PROJECT IDENTITY

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Website

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More Information

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Further reading

Policy Briefs

- How does school segregation shape students' performance, self-esteem and future aspirations? (2010)
- European educational policies for minorities (2009)
- Ethnic differences in compulsory education (2008)

Comparative studies

- 'Visibly Different': Experiences of Second-generation Migrant and Roma Youths at School. A comparative study of

communities in nine member-states of the European Union (2010)

- Ethnic and Social Differences in Education in a Comparative Perspective (2010)
- Comparative Study on Education (2009)
- Comparative Study on Educational Policies for Inclusion (2009)
- Comparative Study on Ethnic Relations (2009)

Community studies

- Community studies published for nine target countries of EDUMIGROM (2010)

Survey studies

- Survey studies published for eight target countries of EDUMIGROM (2010)

Background studies

- Background studies published on Education and on Ethnic Relations for eight target countries of EDUMIGROM (2008)

Occasional papers

- Issues of ethnicity as contextualised in contemporary Britain (Ian Law; 2010)
- Ethnicity in France: selected issues (Claire Schiff; 2010)

Publications can be downloaded free of charge from the Publications diction of the EDUMIGROM website
